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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHDC
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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: EARLY MAYORAL RESULTS SHOW FEW SURPRISES

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On November 16, Kosovo's Central Elections Commission (CEC) released preliminary results for the November 15 mayoral races. In 36 municipalities, 16 mayoral races were decided in the first round, with the ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) taking five, the junior coalition member Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) took three, the opposition Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) winning four (including two Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo), and Serb Independent Liberal Party (SLS) two. Runoffs scheduled for December 13 will take place in 20 municipalities, including ten contests that will pit coalition partners PDK and LDK against each other. Beghet Pacolli's New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) has been the most disgruntled party, complaining that electoral violations in Gjakove and Viti prevented its candidates from winning. We have been advising all parties with complaints to file appeals with the independent Electoral Complaints and Appeals Commission, which has received 11 complaints thus far. The CEC will release preliminary results for Municipal Assembly elections the evening of November 17. We expect to see final, certified results -- following the count of conditional ballots, out-of-Kosovo ballots, and special-needs-voting ballots -- for both mayoralties and assemblies at the beginning of next week. END SUMMARY

EARLY RESULTS LEAVE MUCH IN LIMBO

12. (SBU) In a nationally televised press conference on November 16, Nesrin Lushta, chairperson of Kosovo's Central Elections Commission, provided a municipality by municipality review of preliminary election results for mayor's offices across the country. The results of the first round of voting on November 15 settled races in 16 municipalities -- those where one candidate secured a simple majority of the vote. In the remaining 20 municipalities the top two candidates will square off in a second round of voting on December 13. The parties winning multiple mayor's seats in the first round are the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) with five mayors, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) with three, the

Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) with four, and the Independent Liberal Party (SLS) with two.

PDK IN THE HUNT FOR 22 MAYORS

13. (SBU) Prime Minister Thaci's PDK won outright majorities in five municipalities: Glogovac/Glogovac, Skenderaj/Srbica, Shtime/Stimlje, Ferizaj/Urosevac, and the northern Serb-majority municipality Zubin Potok. This is a disappointing first round total for a party that, following the close of polls on November 15, told the public that it had won 20 municipalities. PDK, however, can look forward to an active campaign in December, as it will be participating in 17 of the 20 second-round elections that will take place on December 13. In 12 of those 17 races, PDK will enter the contest as the leading vote-getter in the first round. If it wins all 12 of those races, PDK will hold 17 mayoralties, one more than it does now. This could be a tall order given PDK's unpopularity outside its core base; though it is the first choice of a committed group of voters, it is not frequently a voter's second choice. PDK could find those parties who failed to make the runoff shifting their support to its opponents in many of these municipalities.

LDK CLAIMS THE BIG PRIZE: PRISTINA

14. (SBU) LDK can claim a big win with its dominant first round victory in the hotly contested election in Pristina (56.6 percent of the vote). Its other first round victories include Podujeve/Podujevo and Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje. LDK was the incumbent party in all four mayoralties. It was also defending Istog/Istok, where it finished first but was forced into a runoff by

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AAK, and Suhareke/Suva Reka, where the party appears to have finished third in a tight three-way race with PDK and AAK. (Note: If uncounted conditional ballots break its way, LDK could manage to make it into a runoff. End Note) LDK will compete in 11 second-round contests, ten of them against its coalition partner, PDK. Runoffs in Prizren, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Lipjan/Lipljan, which will pit the coalition partners against each other, are anticipated to be among the second round's closest races. In each of these three municipalities PDK is the incumbent party. LDK has been stressing that on November 16 it collected almost 40,000 more votes than it did during the 2007's municipal elections. That said, LDK will need a strong showing in the second round if it is to maintain its claim as a national party.

AAK SURPASSES 2007 TOTAL IN FIRST ROUND

15. (SBU) The opposition AAK and its leader Ramush Haradinaj won two mayor's offices in western Kosovo, Decan/Decane and Gjakove/Djakovica, as well as two mayoralties in Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo, Leposavic/Leposaviq, and Zvecan. Decan and Gjakove are traditional AAK strongholds and fall within Haradinaj's local sphere of influence. The Serb boycott of elections in the north made the victories in Leposavic and Zvecan possible. In each municipality, a handful Albanians gave the AAK victories: 67 voters gave AAK 100% of the votes in Leposavic, and 24 AAK voters in Zvecan represented 100% of that municipality's total voter turnout. AAK will participate in 7 run-offs, including in Peje/Pec, where its candidate is the incumbent. Regardless of the results of the runoffs, AAK will regard these elections as a watershed moment in its development. In the 2007 municipal elections, AAK won 56,676 votes. So far this year, with more than 20,000 conditional ballots uncounted, AAK has more than doubled its nationwide vote count to 116,586. Second round victories could see the AAK break out of western Kosovo, as it leads the race in central Kosovo's Suhareke/Suva Reka with 34.3 percent to second-place PDK's 32.2 percent.

SLS GRABS LEGITIMACY

¶6. (SBU) Kosovo's most prominent Serb party, the SLS, has long been dogged with criticism that it does not represent anyone, after it collected only a few hundred votes nationwide in 2007. This year SLS captured more than 2,000 votes in a tense campaign in Gracanica, and its mayoral candidate, Bojan Stojanovic, won more than 60 percent of the vote there for an easy first-round victory. SLS also won in Klokot/Klllokot, where almost 700 Serbs voted and the SLS candidate, Sasa Mirkovic, ran unopposed for mayor of the new municipality. In December, SLS will enter a runoff with PDK in the Strpce/Shterpce, with SLS leading 36.9 percent to 25.8 percent. The promising Serb turnout in both Gracanica and Strpce, two areas that saw widespread boycotts in 2007, represent encouraging signs that more and more Serbs are looking to Kosovo institutions as guarantors of local autonomy, and the 2009 municipal elections give SLS a level of legitimacy that it lacked in the past, perhaps the most welcome news of the election. In Ranilug, the third new Serb-majority, Ahtisaari-mandated municipality to vote on November 16, Gradimir Mikic, the current Serb Deputy Mayor of Kamenica, won. He ran under his own party, Citizens Initiative for Ranilug. Just over 550 Serbs voted in Ranilug.

NOT EVERYONE IS HAPPY

¶7. (SBU) While PDK, AAK, LDK, and SLS can all find some satisfaction -- or, at least, a silver-lining -- in these preliminary results, the New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) and the Democratic League of Dardania (LDD) have nothing to celebrate. AKR and LDD, neither of which held a mayor's office going into the election, formed a pre-election coalition that saw the two parties running joint candidates in most municipalities. AKR hung its hopes on the contest in Gjakove/Djakovica, where it ran former American Chamber of Commerce director Mimoza Kusari. She lost to the AAK candidate, the

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incumbent mayor, Pal Lekaj, by a margin of 52.8 percent to 40.7 percent, an impressive achievement given AAK's greater prominence and organization in the municipality. AKR is protesting the outcome, alleging that AAK stuffed ballot boxes. Kusari has filed complaints with the Electoral Complaints and Appeals Commission (ECAC), and the CEC has quarantined ballot boxes from four polling stations in Gjakove pending an ECAC investigation. LDD, too, won no mayor's offices outright and will pin its hopes on a solid showing in Viti/Vitina, where it narrowly leads PDK, 32.3 percent to 30.5 percent, going into the second round. Neither party met its hopes and expectations, and the two parties' combined vote total, in a year where overall participation increased significantly, fell from 127,000 in the 2007 elections to 89,450 this year.

THE TIMELINE AHEAD

¶8. (SBU) The CEC plans to announce the outcome of municipal assembly elections during an evening press conference on November 17. We expect final certification of all races to occur at the beginning of next week, after the CEC finishes counting more than 20,000 conditional ballots, absentee ballots, and special-needs-voting ballots. ECAC, too, needs to rule on all complaints and investigate irregularities. At present, parties have filed only 11 complaints, and four of them stem from AKR's allegations of AAK ballot-stuffing in Gjakove/Djakovica. Once the first-round has been certified, the CEC will print ballots for the runoffs, and President Sejdiu will announce a new campaign period. The runoffs will take place on December 13.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) We are pleased with the way Kosovo implemented its first post-independence elections, and we released a statement on November 16 that congratulated the country. Certainly, there are some claims of irregularities, and two videos of alleged ballot-stuffing aired on television newscasts on November 16, but all observer missions -- including our own -- have reported that the process was generally fair and transparent. At an informal gathering of the observation missions after polls had closed on November 15, there was universal

acclaim and team leaders from the European Commission and the European Network Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) told us that they had been expecting widespread problems and were pleasantly surprised to see how well elections proceeded. The OSCE, which ran Kosovo's earlier elections, told us today that these municipal elections have been Kosovo's best so far, and OSCE is "stunned" by how smoothly the process has run. The major parties, too, have reason to be happy with the outcomes, thus far. Tensions will increase as we get closer to December 13, however, and with PDK and LDK going head-to-head in ten runoffs, there is always a risk that the coalition will show signs of strain. PDK right now appears confident, but its support is unique in Kosovo. PDK has the most loyal base of support of any party, but its detractors are just as ardent, and it is unclear how many extra votes PDK candidates will be able to collect in its 17 second-round contests. If LDK and AAK leaders encourage their voters to vote against PDK, the Prime Minister's party will suffer and so, too, may the coalition's fortunes.

DELL